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Transcript of Interview with William Franklin Meek

Conducted by Jim Muhn

October 3, 1989

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INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM FRANKLIN MEEK

We're not going to have any problem. What I'm going to do first here is, this is an interview with William Franklin Meek, a former employee of the Bureau of Land Management done in Boulder, Colorado on October 3, 1989. The first question is, just give us a brief rundown as to your career with the Department of the Interior, the General Land Office, and the Bureau of Land Management and any other biographical information you think is important.

MEEK: In the beginning, I was playing golf one day in Glenwood Springs. We lived in Glenwood at the time. I was playing golf with Cal Ferrar of Salt Lake. Cal Ferrar was driving a Ford with an X license. I asked him what the X meant. He said it was exempt. Why was it exempt? It belonged to the Government. Did he work for the Government? Yes. What did he do? He was a Special Agent for the General Land Office, and he was on his way to Aspen to check out some homesteads. So, I thought that sounded like a very good type of a job; I was quite interested. I said, "How do you get a job with an outfit like that?" He said, "You should have no trouble." I said, "Why?" He said, "You live in Glenwood Springs, the home of Ed Taylor, and he has lots of pull on getting people jobs." This was in 1939, early spring of '39. And I said, "Well, Ed Taylor, I think if I remember rightly, he was at the time in Washington." He said, "Why don't you see his Administrative Assistant, Hugh High, who runs the Hardware Store here?" So, I thought that was a good idea. That's the way the whole thing started. I saw Hugh High, told him what I wanted to do, he thought it was a good idea, and we went to work on it. In a few months, I finally received recognition that they had gotten my application on September 7, 1939. I started long before that, but they acknowledged my application. Hugh High received a telegram saying that the Grazing Service jobs were all filled in Salt Lake. We didn't even know what the Grazing Service was; we should have, but we didn't, and we hadn't talked about the Grazing Service anyway. We'd talked about Homestead work and that type of work. So, we went after it again, and it was finally in November that we got a telegram saying there's no space in Salt Lake again, but we do have a 6-month temporary job in Billings. Would you be interested? It didn't take me long to say "Yes." We loaded up our stuff and I had a Ford and a trailer. We put a Conestoga

top on the trailer and we put what little things we had in it and we took off for Billings. And I got my temporary appointment on November 28, 1939. And that appointment said that I was a Special Agent in the Division of Investigations for the General Land Office under the Secretary's Office. Ickes was Secretary then. On arriving in Billings, I met the Special Agent-in-Charge, Bill Burnett. Dale Whiteside was the Director at the time. And I started out learning the business from Lowell Puckett, who was also a Special Agent. These are accepted appointments. There were supposed to be only 6 appointments that Ickes held in his pocket. On May 27, 1940, I was terminated, like they said. Six months. By the way, I started at \$2,900 a year. Grade 11 is what they called it then. And I was terminated 6 months later. I liked the work so well I kept after it, and I got a break in that Puckett had taken an examination some years previously for a guard and had been accepted as a guard. He was on the Civil Service register, and he told Whiteside about it and Whiteside said, "I believe I can work this." And he went back, and he called for that register and they gave him 3 names, one being Puckett, and he chose Puckett and turned the other two back, so Puckett was put on Civil Service. That left this particular slot that he occupied open so I went after it a little harder, using political influence as much as I could, and on October 16, 1941, they gave me Puckett's job. I went back as a Special Agent, but it was \$2,600 a year then. That was in Billings. On July 1 of '42 that particular job was terminated, and I went to a War Service appointment. I don't know if you ever heard of that or not, but this was during the war. And then I was called a Field Examiner. The General Land Office was deleted from the terminology. Field Examiner, grade 11, \$2,600. And then I think it was...that was a Branch of Field Examination.

MUHN: So, you're in the General Land Office now?

MEEK: Well now, was the Branch of Field Examination, was that still in the General Land Office?

MUHN: I think that went into--my understanding is that--and you can correct me--the Division of Investigations was directly

within the Department, and apparently, they had agents that must have been assigned to the various Agencies or to take care of those Agencies' concerns.

MEEK: And that's why I was in the General Land Office then. See, I was assigned then.

MUHN: OK. And then in 1942 the Division of Investigations was eliminated and put into the General Land Office and my understanding is that it was then called the Branch of Field Examinations.

MEEK: That's when it was--July 1 of '42. That's when they changed me to Field Examiner, Branch of Field Examinations. That was still General Land Office, I think. I'm not sure.

MUHN: I'm pretty sure.

MEEK: Then, July 1 of '43 I was promoted and went up to \$2,700, July of '44 they changed the rating to CAF-8 at \$2,900 and August 2 of '44 I was transferred from Billings to Alaska at still \$2,900, but I got the 25% differential, which made it \$3,625. In July 20 of '53 in Alaska my title was changed to Real Property Officer, and then on July 22 of '56 I was reassigned as Land Office Manager, GS-12 at Spokane. And then on February 13 of '63 I was transferred as Land Office Manager to Denver and on September 1. Hockmees got me a 13. He promised me he would do that if I would move. And then on July 27 of '69, I was changed to a Lands and Minerals Adjudication Specialist. I don't know if you've ever heard of that title, and then on May 31 of '71 I retired at GS-13 step 6.

MUHN: Now that last job that you took in 1969, is that when you went to the Service Center?

MEEK: Yeah.

MUHN: O.K.

MEEK: In other words, that carries me through 30 odd years, 32 years, about. The reason why it was that many years is because I had 13 months of sick leave they added at the end. And before I go telling you about specific things--maybe I should start that.

MUHN: Go ahead. It's your interview.

MEEK: I got this out of my daily reports. I went up to Billings on the 28th of November to start. On December 5, 1939, I made my first field trip. I went with Puckett to Sheridan, Wyoming, and our per diem was \$5.00 a day. I thought that was kind of interesting, compared to what it is now. And we had Coal Trespass and we checked County Records. And we returned on the 15th of December 1939. In the meantime, he was screwing me in all the regulations. On December the 18th he took me to Winnett, Montana and we returned on the 22nd. That was on the same kind of a deal. But on the 26th they turned me loose and I went out alone and my first job I was sent to Twin Bridges on sign trespasses and I returned on the 28th, which is just two days. In other words, I had to go out and not only--I had a case or two on sign trespass on public lands. I had to also check the public lands. I had to know which were public lands and check them to see whether or not there were any signs on these public lands. This is when we were really _____ fines we were knocking the signs out on public lands unless they paid for them.

MUHN: The signs you're talking about are like little advertisements?

MEEK: Advertisements. Yeah. Burma Shave was one of them. And then on January 3 of 1940 I made a good field trip. I went into North Dakota and on Timber trespass and Coal Trespass and came back on the 13th of that month. Then on January 22, I went up

to Winnett and roundup and went back to Billings five days later. In other words, they were letting me go out on kinda small trips to see how I was doing. But in January of 1940, I did 29 Coal Trespass cases and 18 Timber Trespass cases and one miscellaneous, and I noticed that of these cases 23 were favorable and 25 were adverse. They had to do all that on the daily reports. Then in '41, starting out in '41, I did a lot of stuff by myself and with Puckett and with Cap and I went to some hearings and did a lot of grazing leases and homesteads and isolated tracts both in Wyoming and North and South Dakota and Montana. And that's the way I really got started insofar this business was concerned. But our grazing leases, of course, were all Section 15 leases.

MUHN: I was going to ask you that.

MEEK: And then I stayed with that type of work all through my Billings experience. And we've been trying to recall why we wanted to go to Alaska, but I remember we did, and when we began to hammer on that, Whiteside said O.K. and he gave me a transfer. When I went to Alaska, there were two ladies in the land office and one man in our organization, Orville Shirley--well, I should say two men. Orville Shirley was our secretary. And he was a great shorthand man. He did everything by shorthand in nothing flat. He was very good. And the other man was Harvey Carlisle who had been in Alaska for several years and had been transferred out and had just returned. I think he had been out for seven years, in California working, and the reason why his transfer was--he told me that he used to do a lot of his Alaska work by dog team, and he bought furs on the side. He lived in Fairbanks and bought furs and they didn't like that. So, they decided to break that up and that's why he was transferred out so when he came back, he was really returning to his old home country. He had a home in Fairbanks and a wife in Fairbanks. And so, he was working a few of the old cases and all the rest of them had been piling up all these years. Nobody had been working it except those few that would come up, what they'd call snowbirds. They would come up in the spring, work the summer, and go back in the fall from stateside. So I was, you might say, on my own when I arrived. Puckett came up as a I don't know if they called him state Director or not. But

anyway, he came up to run the organization when they began to put it together in the following year. So, in the meantime I was by myself, and I started out going up to Fairbanks and my first jaunt was down the Cuskaquin River from Fairbanks after I checked the Land Office records. I went down to McGrath and Aniak and Bethel and other towns in between. My first airplane trip, it was my first airplane trip, too, was on a small plane, I sat on a frozen side of beef and I had about 5 or 6 cases of booze to my back. The man was carrying freight as well as me. He carried me to McGrath that way. And when I went on downriver from McGrath, I took another plane that was loaded with outboard motors. That was the way they traveled in those days. Practically all by plane, anyway. So that was my first field trip, and a good share of it was weathered in waiting for a plane. Lots of that. And then in 1945, I took a very interesting trip down to Chane. A lot of applications had been built up with canneries and with sheepherders or sheepmen, and I don't remember now--different applicants of different types on up to Chane (19) and I had to work out a way to get there. I finally got it started. On July 14 of '45 I went to Whittier and got my transportation on the Motorship Colonel Jarrett D.S. (19) Quackenbush and departed from Whittier at four o'clock on that particular day and started out and I went down to Shelikof Straits, went to Yuyak, and went to Chignik, and went to--I was working all the time on various cases at the same time. This Jarrett D.L. (20) Quackenbush was an army boat that was carrying supplies to various army installations out there and they would stop for me, and I would stop for them where they dropped supplies and I finally arrived in Sandpoint on July 18th and worked there on the 19th and 20th Oh I think I missed one here. Somewhere I got them to --When I was going down to Yuyak (22) on the Quackenbush, I knew I was going to have to leave the Quackenbush later on down and I contacted a Fish and Wildlife boat the Motorship Swan by signal light requesting that they advise Fish and Wildlife boat Motorship Crane of my arrival date at Sandpoint. The Swan answered that they would relay the information. Fish and Wildlife also had a series of boats which I used quite a bit later on in working my Kodiak stuff, so I knew that I was going to have to leave the Quackenbush and pick up the Crane to get the rest of it. So, I went on down and to make a long story short we went as far as Falls Pass and back and I tried to get into Coal Bay and the harbor was filled with Russian ships and our ships and there was a tremendous transfer

going on I noticed as I was going in one Russian ship was taking out--he had six locomotives topside, taking them over to Russia. And when we got into Coal Bay, we did dock. They wouldn't let us ashore. We stayed there for two or three hours trying to get ashore because I had to go on to Umnak (24) and I couldn't make it unless I got off at Coal Bay and took a plane on over, and I noticed that there was all kinds of war material being transferred from one ship to the other, to these Russian ships, it was in the Lendlease days. And all this was going into Coal Bay and that was the transfer point. So, it was all very interesting. And finally, they took me around to King Cove which is just around the corner from Cove Bay and I was holed up there for 10-12 days. And there was an army boat small boat skippered by a boy that had a girlfriend in King Cove and he was making periodic trips and I finally got acquainted with him and talked him into taking me back. By that time traffic had moved on. The decks were clear. So he took me back and the Navy took me in, bedded me and boarded me, even saw a picture show, and the next day flew me over to Port Glen at Umnak (26) and from Port Glen I was trying to get down to Nikiski (26) which is on the tail end of Umnak Island and where we had grazing leases with the Aleutians. Pendleton - let's see - Pendleton was down on the end of Umnak and this was the first time I'd seen those famous Aleutian sheep, and they were beautiful, and they were good, they were delicious too. That's what they lived on down there. The town of Nikiski was vacated there were great big numbers on every house. They'd taken all of the Nikiski people down to southeastern during the war. One of the reasons I was having problems with Unalaska had just been bombed previously by the Japs, and they were pretty skittish about people coming through. But anyway, I finally made it down well quite a bit previous because I was on Umnak Island at Port Glen when VJ Day came. I spent VJ Day in Alaska. So, it was a couple of years I guess ahead of that they bombed it. They were still kinda skittish. So, I did my work, finally got it completed down at Unalaska and came back to Port Glen and they had a prisoner. They took him over to Shinofsky, which is on the tail end on Unalaska Island. I managed to hook a ride on a skow that took us across and the next day I boarded a rescue ship. It was brand new. It was about 90 feet long, and it was powered by three 12-cylinder Packards. It made a tremendous noise, and it was awfully, awfully fast. It was made of plywood. The Bering Sea is pretty much like a washtub. A shallow sea, always an

awful lot of wind. This particular morning, we started out with this prisoner--that was the purpose of going to Unalaska--it began to storm real hard, and before he got out of the Bay, he had his windshield wipers knocked off. But this boy who was driving it was from the Southeast and he had a crew made up of boys from Georgia and Alabama who had never been up North before. They promptly got sick, and I did too later on, and we fought that Bering Sea all day long on a diagonal course trying to get to Dutch Harbor and we finally made it in the afternoon. We started about 5:00. It was a long, hard trip and from there I got a plane and finally got back to Anchorage. It was pretty much all summer long doing this. I was out quite awhile. And then, to give you an idea how some of the traffic was up there, how some of the jobs were--you said that you interviewed Jorgenson.

MUHN: No, we didn't. I'm very much aware of him, and someday I would like to. We have his book that he wrote on Alaska.

MEEK: Good. Jorgenson also worked with us up there. This is in December of '48. I should go back and tell you to begin with that in Fairbanks our transportation was an old Plymouth, and we kept it at the Alaska Road Commission. We didn't keep it garaged because we didn't have room, but we kept it outside of their building and I would come down in the morning and get them and we would start it and go, and the way we would do it in the wintertime was, they would come out with a road grader and hook onto it and we would take what they called a farmer's loop which is outside of Fairbanks just a loop road around and I would put it in gear after we got started and we'd finally get the wheels turning. We wouldn't be skidding. The wheels would turn. Once we got the wheels to turn, we'd come back into the Road Commission yard and they'd bring out an extra battery and hook up the battery and then one of them would get on top with what we called bug juice which is starting fluid and he'd begin to pump it into the carburetor and I would touch it off with two batteries and finally it would take and it sounded like a bunch of tin cans, it was so rattily. But anyway, we were expected to, and we did, work down to 40 below. I was by myself, but I'd go out and work and I'd leave the thing running all day long, just letting it idle to keep the grease going and so forth. All

day. All day was short. By the time I got it going it would be daybreak and in Fairbanks in the wintertime that would come about 9:30 or 10:00 and by 2:00 it would begin to get dark. I'd come on in. So that's what we had, was that old Plymouth. That thing had seen a lot of service. It was getting pretty sorry, so we finally got a--if I remember rightly, it was a Nash to take up to Fairbanks to replace the Plymouth. On December the second, 1948, Georgie and I started up for Fairbanks. We went to Glennallen made it the first night. We got a late start and before we left, this was on December second. It was cold and Georgie had shoepacks. I said, "Georgie your feet will freeze in that rubber. You must get yourself some decent shoes." He said he would, but he was very forgetful, and he didn't. I had what were called Bunny Boots, Army issue. They were felt, and I was wearing them, and I had a brand-new pair of mukluks with me that I just got. And they were packed. So, we started out. By the way I was wearing--I had the long handles on and the Felson pants and so forth and I was wearing a light jacket. This was Army issue. We were able to get a lot of Army stuff out there, but that was in the days of the Army, it's now the Air Force, so they had flight jackets. The Army was flying. And I had this good flight jacket which was sheep lined so I thought I was pretty well protected. So, we got to Glennallen and then on December the 3rd we took off for Tok. Tok is on the Alaska Highway. Have you been up there?

MUHN: No, but I've heard of it.

MEEK: It was on the Alaska Highway, so we had to go from Glennallen over to Tok. And we started out at 3:00 in the afternoon, which was a mistake. Georgie is a great talker, and he gets wound up with what he's saying, and he was driving, but he wasn't watching. So, he wrecked the car, drove off into the toolies, over the rocks and everything. I bumped up against the rear-view mirror and cut my head and blood was running down I finally got my handkerchief out pulled my cap down and I had earlaps on it and I tied it real tight to stop the bleeding and I said, "Georgie I'm keeping track." I was concerned about where we might be. I said, "Two miles back we passed a Road Commission place." I knew it was there because I'd been there several times, and there was a light there. They had a winter

man. It was two miles or four miles I don't remember which but I said, "We've got a ways to walk." There wasn't much snow on the road, mostly icy and cold and it was a dirt road and pretty stony. So, I said, "You're going to freeze your feet to do this." I knew it was cold. So I said, "You take my bunny boots and I'll put my mukluks on." This was the first time on my mukluks and the soles were pretty slick. I could feel the rocks. But anyway, we walked as fast as we dared without hurting our lungs, but before we got there, and I didn't know how cold it was until I got there and before we got there above my knees was larding up and my fanny was larding up, I could tell that, because my flight jacket didn't come down to cover me. We got there; it was 52 below. So, this Road Commission man took me down to Dacona, which is a roadhouse about 16 miles further down, and I remember that they were having a birthday party for Homer Oats, I'll never forget that name. Homer Oats was in his 60's and he was having a birthday and they were all higher than a kite, so we must join the party. So anyway, they took care of it. And then that was the 3rd of December. The 4th of December we accompanied the Road Commission back to where the car was and helped them get it out. They took it back to the Road Commission camp at Glennallen and they temporarily fixed it. It wasn't too badly damaged. They fixed it so we could run it. The main thing was that the front end was so out of line. We left Glennallen at 10:00 and we arrived at Toke Junction at 4:00. I drove. I said, "Georgie, you're through driving." I wouldn't trust him anymore. We had dinner at the ARC. They charged us there. Most of the time we would take care of it, but at that time the temperature dropped to 65 below. I know as I was driving in, I was having an awful time trying to see because even with the defroster going it was still building up and Georgie was trying to keep a little patch open and there was just a little hole when I got there. The next day we holed up. It was 72 below. We decided it was just not conducive to going to work. At that time there was a lady flying around the world making a general nuisance of herself with these Army posts and all, and she went down somewhere over there near Tok, and the Army was out trying to find her. There was a Captain in a Jeep along with a driver and they overturned, and he hurt his leg. I don't remember if it was broken or what it was. Anyway, he was hurt. And they came back and said, "We've got so much to do and we haven't found her yet. Are you leaving?" We were going to leave tomorrow. There was an Army

camp near there. We planned on leaving, although weren't sure about how cold it was going to be. We didn't know whether we'd dare travel. They said, "Well, if you do go in can you take the Captain in so he can go to the hospital and get fixed up?" So, we said yes. So, in the morning while it was cold it went back to 65 at Tok, some miles down the road it bounced up to 40 below and so we decided to go. We went on into Fairbanks, and on the 7th of December I don't remember how many miles we went, but all of a sudden within 2 or 3 miles it went up from 65 to 40. So, help me, it was just almost like springtime, there was so much difference. The windshield cleared up and everything. So, we took the boy back into Fairbanks and that was kind of an interesting trip we had when we hit some cold weather wrecked the car and trying to get a car up to Fairbanks so we would have transportation. That was just one of the things I wanted to tell you. Now I didn't go through all the others, but there were a lot of things I was noticing that I did that I was surprised that I did and so forth. Maybe you have some questions by now.

MUHN: Oh, I have lots of questions. I guess what I'll do--I'll stick with Alaska since we're at Alaska.

MEEK: Yeah. And then of course I can tell you about Spokane and Denver too. But there isn't much to tell.

MUHN: OK. Well, I think you know for today I have a feeling that we'll be lucky if we even get through Alaska. Now you went up to Alaska just when the war started.

MEEK: Yeah. I might add that before that in about a year three of us Caplin and I don't remember the name of the other boy and myself went to Seattle to try and get in the Navy, and they wouldn't take Caplin because his brother was a Romanian and they wouldn't take me because--they said because I had an umbilical hernia and it turned out that I was too old. They'd have to give me 2 and a half stripes within a few months because of my birthday and they would take the third boy, but he chickened out. So, we all three came back. It was war years. And incidentally when we went up to Alaska on the Alaska steam that

was seven days and eight nights blackout time. We went without lights, and we saw quite a bit of traffic coming down, even one traffic was half of a ship being towed by another one and there was very much evidence of the war going on at the time.

MUHN: At least when the war was going on there wasn't that much activity in terms of land cases I assume?

MEEK: There was. There was getting to be.

MUHN: So even during the war--we know after the war there was a big boom, but it was beginning during the war?

MEEK: Even during the war. When we arrived in Alaska the town was jammed full.

MUHN: At Anchorage?

MEEK: At Anchorage. Yeah. The population was a little over 9,000. And we didn't realize it. We had not been able to learn of any hotel to wire ahead for reservations. But some of our friends that we made aboard the ship took care of it to the point that when they got to Seward, they called up to one of the hotels and it was the Parsons Hotel and got us a room. By the way, we had a dog, too. We took a dog. And it's a wonder they took us, but they did. And we could only stay in that room two days was it, honey? Was it two days we could stay at the Parsons'?

Mrs. MEEK: I think so.

MEEK: And thanks to my sweet wife, in the meantime I was trying to get everything from the depot up and trying to get strung around as to where we were going to live and how we were going to live and that dog to contend with, Gypsy. She was on the

street and met one of those people off of the boat and they were asking about employment and they said, "Have you tried the bank?" is that it?

Mrs. MEEK: No, no. She said that they were hiring at the bank, and you get an apartment. A place to live. So, without even putting on any fresh lipstick she rushed into the bank and got a job. Just like that. That was the way everybody was landing there. They'd get work the minute they got in. It was just a boomtown feeling. And they gave us an apartment. That was part of the business. If they wanted to get somebody, they had to supply a place to live. And so, they had an apartment all ready in the bank building. We lived there for a few months and then were able to get an apartment on down the street. The Land Office had two ladies--Florence Cobe and Doris Robinson--and Florence Cobe was a Bostonian who had worked in Washington and apparently--I've never looked it up to try to prove it--but apparently became somehow involved in the Wyoming oil scandal in the early days, being the secretary and so forth. Anyway, they sent her up to Alaska and she was in the Land Office, and the other was Doris Robinson who was an old maid who had a brother who worked for the Alaska Railroad. That's why she was there. And those two ladies were running the Land Office. And it was swamped, beginning to get swamped. And it was in the Federal Building. And there were quite a number of people beginning to drift up there. The road was not completed yet. By the way, we made that road six times, 3 times down and 3 times back. Beautiful trip. It was all dirt and sand. But they were drifting in and getting employment, particularly with Morrison-Knudson and such outfits that were beginning to build, not only beginning to build, but had been building airports and installations way, way out on the chain and all down through the coastal areas. In fact, there were a lot of these installations that were finally abandoned by the military that we gained afterwards. We were never able to do much with them. But they were complete in that they had their huts and these KD huts that were all put together with bolts. They were good ones, too. Complete water service, fire plugs and all of that. But anyway, it was beginning to show up in a big way. The Land Office Manager was George Lingo who was in the Navy at the time and shortly thereafter the war over he was mustered out. And incidentally, George Lingo's horses up here. This is a Ziegler

picture. In the early days George Lingo not only had a water service in Fairbanks but he also had some horses and he used to pack out. Ziegler was the No. 2 artist up there. That's one reason I got the picture, was because those were George's horses. He came back and began to run the Land Office, so there finally was a manager, but we were without a manager all during the war.

MUHN: Now, I've read in one account where it might have been an Assistant Secretary, but somebody who was in the Department of the Interior, they were discussing the boom in homesteading after the war, particularly after the war, and the comment was made that few of the homesteaders that were coming in at that time were bona fide settlers. They were basically speculators. From the work that you people were doing, do you feel that was true, or do you feel --

MEEK: No. No, it wasn't true. I will say this. A lot of them went belly up, because it was a hard job to clear 20 acres on 160, and they all agreed to take the 160. My early years there was primarily homestead work.

MUHN: You made a comment of course that you held their feet to the fire in terms of the 20-acre requirement, as to cultivation, and then you said that your office was basically interested in getting people to take homesites on small tracts.

MEEK: They were building reasonable cabins, a good share of them were. They were able to do that, but it was a big job to cultivate it, to clear it. They had to clear it first. And bulldoze it up, try to burn it, try to get the land in cultivation. And as long as the law said that we figured we had to hang to it. That's why we ended up with the small tracts. Then I was mentioning this area that Georgie found, that being his job. He was trying his best to carry on this small tract program. And he created this withdrawal from mean high tide. Anyway, Leonard Berlin came in and surveyed up five-acre sites on 160 acres and after he left a man homesteaded it, and we tried to kick him off, and if I remember rightly, he took us to

Court. Yes, he did take us to Court, although I didn't testify. As it turned out it was his idea of mean high tide on Turnagain Arm, which was a very nebulous spot. Tides on Turnagain Arm were fantastic. In fact, it's one of the places up there in which there is a tidal bore. The tide goes out so far if the wind keeps it out it finally builds up to the point it comes back in a rolling bore. It seemed to me that in elevation it was 26 to 28 feet. Turnagain Arm is largely flat. So, mean high tide was practically meaningless and this man got the 160 acres of 5-acre homesites. We had to give it to him because he went ahead and proved up.

MUHN: The withdrawal didn't stop him?

MEEK: No, it didn't stop him because we were wrong on the withdrawal. Georgie hadn't looked that up enough to see what it was. Anyway, that's the way it ended up on that. But most of the homesites were legitimate and we used that to a great extent trying to take care of the people who did come up. There were times when I had to leave the field work and go to the Land Office and work and take my spot on the counter. We all took turns on that because they were packed up clear out into the hallway trying to get in. We were trying to explain and trying to give them the correct forms and so forth. Yes, there was a big rush. There's another thing that it might be a little bold for me to say and you might not want to include this, but we were all aware that we were 5,000 miles from Washington, and we were likewise aware that Washington didn't know what it was like in Alaska, and so there were places where we had to bend, we felt, and we did it, because we thought it was the proper thing to do. I'll give you an example. One of the favorite ways for the cannery to apply required lands whether it be for warehouses or for docks or for fishing sites or what have you was soldiers' additional script. They bought lots of it. They had it in a safe, and they applied it. And we had no difficulty in using the script for awhile until somebody in Washington decided that this script was meant only for agricultural land, and they began to adverse--In the 1D's there's still some of those old cases that I worked on that were adverse. Finally, they conceded to ask us - is this agricultural land? And so, I had to tell them, and I enjoyed telling them that wherever these script filings

were there were always communities around them. They had good gardens, and they raised this, this, this, so it was certainly agricultural land. Not that they had to make any plantings, the script filers didn't, but somebody wanted to know to be sure it was agricultural land so that's the way we took care of that - that's one way we kinda bent the regulations. To us it was logical.

MUHN: Well, you're not the only one that's made comments similar to that Roger Robinson who was the head of the Alaskan Fire Control Service has expressed his frustrations of having to deal with Washington being out in Alaska and the difficulty of communication and essentially having to take the bull by the horns to make sure that things got accomplished. I mean, I'm glad to hear that. One of the things, when you're talking about the Small Tract Act, when we working and researching Alaska in the 50's one of the constant frustrations that came out in various Bureau of Land Management reports was the fact that unlike the lower 48 where they had the Taylor Grazing Act they had no general classification authority in Alaska; therefore they could not do the things that they wanted to in terms of trying to stop homesteads from going in certain places and making sure that if lands were better used for Small Tract Act sites they could use it that way, and it appears that one method of trying to get around that and from what you said it sounded like this is exactly what they were trying to do, was using withdrawal to forestall settlement in a particular area until you got whatever in place and then to revoke the withdrawal and allow the small tract to go ahead and keep the homesteaders out. Is that somewhat true?

MEEK: Georgie did. He was the one responsible for that. None of the others were particularly conscious of it because we had a feeling more for the individual and we also had a feeling for settlement. We wanted to see the country grow, and just didn't necessarily subscribe to all they thought in Washington. ____ (9) ____ manufacturing sites, for example, which served a good purpose. It was a good law. We used that to a certain extent. The main thing we did was help the settlers get located, and as far as locating from a standpoint of trying to cash in and then go, no, we didn't have much of

that. These were almost all young people that came. They came to establish a home. They wanted to stay. The speculator in our day was not apparent at all because it was too rough and awkward for him. He wouldn't enjoy himself in that climate, in that attitude. He wouldn't be comfortable. But the boy that a glint in their eyes, and also, we must remember that a good share of them had a hard time if they were married because they left the wife or if the wife was with them, it was hard for her to take. It was awfully hard on the women at first and probably the breakups, perpetual breakups in families' lives because of the inability of the women to take it. It probably was the biggest influence on those who gave up. If they were single, they made it one way or another. They might not have gotten 160 acres, but they got something. They hung to it. But it was harder on the families. Now our own people--Jorgenson's brother-in-law George Gustovson--he didn't retire until quite late. He's gone now unfortunately, but he built a nice cabin and right close to him was another BLMer that built a nice cabin. Georgie still goes up and visits some of his relatives up there every summer. Those that had jobs to begin with and had an income were able to cope a little better, but an awful lot of them didn't have. They just came up to locate. But the small tract was a big feature.

MUHN: One of the things I noticed--there were a lot of small tract applications and at first mostly seemed to be leases and then the leases sort of disappeared and everybody seemed to be taking everything to Pat rather than lease. Was that a trend that BLM tried to promote?

MEEK: No. That was largely Puckett. He's gone too so I shouldn't talk about him, but Puckett was always very cautious. He was a cautious man, and he was not too keen on letting these guys go to Pat. And incidentally, there's another thing, and that was the Alaska Public Sale Act and that kinda circumvented Puckett. It went right direct to sale, and it depended on your pocketbook to a great extent. But he wanted to be sure that everybody proved up. He wasn't in the field in Alaska at all; he worked from the office, and he consequently didn't have the real feel as to what it was like in the boon docks. And it was tough for those trying to make it. A lot of those boys ended up in the fishing industry. That was profitable.

MUHN: A lot of the homesteaders and the small tract people?

MEEK: Well, I say a lot of them, not a lot of them, but a good share of them, those that stayed. They had to have some kind of reasonable employment, and that gave them employment. It was seasonal, of course, but it gave them employment, and that way they were able to do that in the spring, summer and fall and go back to their location in the winter. But it did help them to a great extent. When we went up mining had practically slowed down and because gold had stopped--Roosevelt stopped all of that. There was no more gold mining. Fishing was going full tilt. There were canneries all up and down southeastern especially in Bristol Bay, even up as far as the Yukon. There was one cannery in the Yukon, and they had a very, very fancy King Salmon that they processed in pound cans and wrapped them in tissue paper and sent them right straight to New York. They had a small market. That was the furthest one north, in the Yukon.

And one of the things too I might add my last days in Alaska, the last 2 or 3 years were devoted almost entirely to townsites, and Alaska dated claims and townsites. That was the last, then just ahead of the last I finally we had certain territories we finally adjusted to, and my territory finally became in addition to Kodiak and some Homer, Bristol Bay. I had all of Bristol Bay, and that was a very, very interesting country to visit. It's probably the richest red salmon country in the world, and there are lots and lots of canneries on the Quickcut, (side 2 at about 30 on cassette) Nushagak and Quechak Rivers. A lot of canneries in there that are stateside owned, and they started in the early days with Chinese labor. One of them even started--in a way we got them interested in this--they started taking native labor, and one of them PAF Pacific American Fisheries, they went clear up to _____ (40 on cassette) Kotzebue to get their help, Native help. I remember one thing in Dillingham there was a nice PAF cannery, and they were attempting to do an exclusive pact on Kings. They put quite a bit of money into developing machinery that would take out the backbone of a King and they could make good filets or slices all the way. So, they bought a lot of Kings that year and these Natives that came down from

Kotzebue were great fish eaters and they were accustomed to making what they called "titbuckolds," and they began to take these fish heads that were scrap, not being used, and bury them out in the tundra not very far away from the cannery in titbuckolds. And the dogs all knew where they were; they could smell them, and they'd try to dig them up and all that. And finally, the superintendent found out what they were doing, and he just went up in the air. He said, "You can't live like that." He tried to explain to them that that was not the way to do it. He furnished some great big oak barrels and so by golly then they began to pack their fish heads in oak barrels and put them down in salt water and they were very pleased and after that he had no trouble getting help out of Kotzebue. Related to those things, all the time we tried to work these things out.

MUHN: As long as we're talking about Natives, you did work with the Alaskan Natives. There was a 1906 Allotment Act there was a Town Site Act for Natives I think about 1923.

MEEK: Yeah. There were surveys all over the territory. I don't know why the surveys were made so early and then they forgot about them. They just sat there, and these Natives had their _____ to a great extent on the surveyed line. I've got them all in the book there. It would take time to find them, but I could find them, but I do know that we used to hold auctions on the sales that were free, that didn't have any Native connection. I remember I got \$2,070 in Petersburg and \$3,610 in Wrangle. I ran across that just accidentally.

MUHN: Is this under the Alaska Public Land Sale Act?

MEEK: Yes, but these were Town Site laws. They were always held in the biggest saloon in town, on account of that was the only place that had enough room to hold them. Here's the book, yeah. I had Petersburg and Wrangle and Togiak and McGrath and Kenai and Talkeetna and Dirtwood and Big Delta and Buffalo Center, now that was a sale. Kotzebue and Pelican and numerous others. Buffalo Center--this saloon wasn't very big. In Big Delta we went into the biggest place in town to hold them. Now

the Talkeetna one was in the hotel. Invariably they'd belly up to the bar to begin with, so the sales were always exciting. I remember in Big Delta and Buffalo Center two things--one, old Berlin laid it out. It was right at the junction of the Alaska Highway and the Richardson Trail where it came in and a triangle and we surveyed it all out--streets and alleys, lots, and blocks. And the streets were first, second and third, and I don't remember what else we used. And we decided that was not appropriate at all so Wyler and I got our heads together and after he made the survey, we renamed the streets. We put Fox and Beaver and Buffalo, and we used all kinds of names on the streets. Anyway, the day I held the sale there were some boots along the side. It held about a dozen people; the rest were bar stools on the side. They were all jammed in there and I was standing on a booze box trying to sell these lots and there was a priest in back sitting in a booth. I'd start out on a corner lot, and he'd bid it right off the bat and he'd bid a hundred and some bucks; I don't remember what it was, and then they'd overbid him, and I'd sell the block and then I'd go to the next block. The first lot out here he came bidding on that lot. And so, after about four blocks I stopped the sale and I went back and I said, "Father, why are you bidding, what is it you're trying to do?" He said, "I want to build a church. I'm trying to find a place to build a church." So, I said, "Why didn't you tell me?" I went back and I announced it. Father so and so whatever his name was is trying to build a church. He's been bidding every time and you've been outbidding him. So, I said, I'm going to try this lot, Lot so and so, Lot 1 I guess it was and that's all I had to say, so I tried it and he bid it and anybody else? No, they shut up, see, so he got his lot and that was kind of strange to do it that way. It wasn't very good but at least we got him placed so he could build a church. I figured that was all right and that was the way we sold the lots pretty much all through the country. We adapted to the people as to what was needed and what was required. And I understand now that Buffalo Center is quite a place. And incidentally CAA in those days was Aeronautics Adm. Now it's FAA had a beautiful airport right close to it, and it was overrun with buffalo. I've got some pictures in there of those buffalo. They're beautiful big creatures. They were transplanted, of course, but they thrived on the _____ (55 on cassette) line and what else they had on the flats of the Tanana River which ran close by. And they were let alone for years. Now there's a little

season on them. They can get a few if they want. But anyway, they're still residents of that area I guess, and they probably have taken them and transplanted them other places too. But that happened to be a big deal. In Kotzebue there was a good share occupied by Natives. And then I sold them all. In Dirtwood, there were no Natives in Dirtwood. But a good share of it was covered with water, and I understand now it's pretty well drained. And one of the things that would happen at these sales, and I would have to watch pretty carefully and try to stop it because as I said in the beginning they'd belly up to the bar and they were all fired up to go. I would begin to cry these lots and they would begin to bid against themselves. Unconsciously they'd up it again, up it again, up it again, the same person. So, I'd stop them. No use letting them go crazy on the thing. And then if they wanted to go ahead after we got some more bids that would be all right, but actually that happened several times in several different places. Only because I suppose of where we were. But it was the only place we could sell, because--you have a picture there of the town site sale at Anchorage. That was held outdoors. And that's the only one I know of that was held outdoors. That was 1917. But these were mixtures. Now, in the early days Puckett liked to sign those, sign the patents. But finally, it got too much even for him to do it, and finally I was Town Site Trustee, and then when I left Jorgenson took it over and he was Town Site Trustee until he quit and there was still lots of that stuff to go. But it was one phase of the business that did help the people, because it gave them a legal place to live. There was an awful lot of squatting done up there. People just drifted up there and squatted, and there wasn't much surveying, either.

MUHN: Was there much effort to enforce trespass?

MEEK: No, the effort was to--you remember that story I wrote you on the Arnegard? The effort was to fix them up like I did there. In other words, when we found them in trespass, get 'em legal. That was quite a bit of work. Quite a bit of our work was that. Get 'em legal. And we felt that it was a better public service than trespassing them and trying to kick them off. In the first place, they wouldn't go anyway, and in the second place we weren't big enough to do it.

MUHN: Lack of surveys was a big problem then, from the way you talk?

MEEK: It was, yes. Berlin did an awful lot of surveying. You've talked with Berlin, have you not?

MUHN: No.

MEEK: You have not? In fact, he had to leave for awhile to go to South America. He was with Byrd for awhile. He was an excellent surveyor. Of course, he wasn't doing the modern stuff that they do nowadays, but he was doing it the hard way, on the ground. Taking his sitings at noon and putting these location monuments all over the territory, which it was in those days. Those were the territory days. But he didn't have very much help. Lyle Jones was still there. He was a big help to him, and I guess Kenny Witt was up there too for awhile, I'm not sure. So, he had help. He had one man that swamped for him. It wasn't too long ago that old Swede quit, too. And he would winter in Washington or Oregon, I don't know which. But I never saw such a worker as that guy was. Great, big, tall Swede, and he could swing a double blade with no trouble at all, and he knew his directions. Leonard would point and away he would go. He'd swamp ahead and they'd get the thing going. A lot of this was short spruce. It was years and years and years old, but it wasn't able to grow much. So that was mostly what he was wading through. However, in the Fairbanks area my first job to a great extent was timber trespass. They were trespassing quite a bit up there. Two things--the residents of Fairbanks were largely wood burners for wintertime heat, and all of the boat traffic on the Yukon and the Pananaw and the Chena was wood burning, and the timber cutters were spotted in various places up and down the river and would have their piles of cordwood at the bank so that as these steamers came along they would shove into the mud and hook long enough to take on the wood and then try to get back out and go. And they'd buy the wood that way. Well, of course it came from public land, and so we were trying to educate them to get timber permits and consequently that's why I

did a lot of timber trespass. And we did trespass a bit in that respect. That was a good share of our cases--trespass and homestead. That was in the early days, and then we gradually worked into these other Alaska Land laws.

MUHN: When you worked on timber trespass, did you in the early days have much contact with that Alaska Fire Control Service, or were they pretty much on their own even though they were also GLO?

MEEK: No, we didn't have much because Roger and _____ (70 on cassette) didn't get along. For some reason or another, I don't know whether--well they spoke, they managed to, as far as legally, keep connected. But they didn't spend much time with each other, let's put it that way. They ran their own ships. That's one reason why old Moose Dreyfuss made those cracks about Wyler. He didn't tell all the truth.

MUHN: Well, several people told us that.

MEEK: Is that so? Wyler had a moose down and he had to go to town. He was at Rico Wallack's place; they were staying at her road house but he had to go to town for something and he came back to get the moose and in the meantime the fire was going. Moose told him not to go in and he said, the hell with you I'm going to get my moose and that was it. And Moose talks about that fancy place that he had--you should have seen it--for a land Office. It was the last floor up on the Post Office in Fairbanks, and a little old tiny cubicle deal and they were all jammed in there, what few there were, there were just a few; Wyler and Seeger and there was an awful pretty girl. I don't remember her name. And another one--maybe there were four in there and they were really stepping on each other's toes practically. That was the pretty place he talked about. Anyway, it was largely that type of stuff to begin with.

From the Seward Highway to Feyni, which now has the community of Soldotna, which I've never seen, and apparently, it's grown to be quite a big place and we were the first people in from the

Road Commission, and I'll show you what that looked like and what we did and how we got there. The reason why is, we took two surplus 4 by 4's from Anchorage down to Homer. We didn't have any transportation at Homer. We were tired of having to do this by boat and by foot and by air that's the only way we were able to get around on these places unless we wanted to drive the long way to Fairbanks. I was looking at those pictures and I thought, "My God, did I do that?"

On one of my fieldtrips, I left with our pilot in a Cessna. The pilot's name was McCormick and he had a BLM Cessna and we were headed for McGrath and Galena and Antiak and Bethel and back, and we made it to McGrath in short order and stopped at Galena at the CAA Airport and had lunch with the military and on down to Antiak, and by the time I got through with my work at Antiak it was raining and we decided to go back to McGrath. I said, "Why not go to Galena?" and he said, "I did not like the roaches that were crawling on the table where we ate. I know that they're all right at McGrath so let's go back to McGrath." Well, I said, "There are a number of hills between Antiak and McGrath. How do you propose to get across them?" And he said, "We'll set a course. You help me and we'll see what we can do." And we left the Antiak Airport, which is a little dogleg affair downhill across the cemetery. We got by that all right, and we started out and set a course. And with us was Victor Fisher. This was his first trip. He was new to Alaska, and he was sitting in the back with a 5-gallon can of gas. We had failed to top the tanks before we left Antiak. I mentioned it enroute and he said, "That's all right. We've got enough to get to McGrath." Well, it began to rain a little harder as we went on and we crossed the first hills in fair shape and we got into the second or third group of hills, I don't remember which. When we crossed the saddle, the fog was down, and before we could get to the other side the fog came clear down and sealed us off. All we could see--we were flying maybe 100 feet of the ground, and all we could see was fog all around and hills. And he said, "We've got to find a place to set down." I said, "Well, can't we find a way out of here?" He said, "Well, which way are the streams running?" And I must admit that it was awfully difficult to tell which way the streams were running. But finally, we got down low enough, he said, "I think that I can land on this rocky sandbar here and spend time here until we get help to get out." He said, "I'll probably wipe out the gear,

but at least we'll get down." And so, he flew over it real low to scout as to how it looked and he could get an idea where to put it down. And as he did so I said, "I see what I think is a log, not a beaver swimming or a muskrat, I think it is a log and if it is, we are headed out. Let's follow this stream." He said, "Fine. That's what I was looking for." And we followed the stream out and the fog kept getting down lower and lower until we were almost on the deck. Until we got out in the flats, and we could see the Yukon. Once we found the Yukon, we went down the Yukon till we saw the lights at Galena and we settled there, and we were there for three days because of wind. It became a terrific storm, and we were socked in. And we ate at the Army mess and we enjoyed it. That was one experience I'll never forget.

MUHN: Well, I think I've used enough of your time. I've been here almost two hours---